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ABSTRACT

This paper is a preliminary attempt to specify what "interpersonal confirmation" is by classifying and categorizing its observable phenomena as they occur in human interaction. It considers the problems in defining operationally this highly significant, but nebulous, aspect of communication and reviews the literature which alludes to confirmation and disconfirmation or provides descriptive material from which empirical indicators can be derived. Finally, it synthesizes and systematizes the indicators into a paradigm of four hierarchical levels, which permits testing of posited relationships and outcomes. The paper reports research procedures that refined and validated the model, as well as related research which has utilized the concept of interpersonal Confirmation. (Author)

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INTERPERSONAL CONFIRMATION: A PARADIGM FOR CONCEPTUALIZATION AND MEASUREMENT

Evelyn Sieburg

In his Presidential Address to the 1973 International Communication Convention, Malcolm MacLean commented that "There are many ways to kill the spirit of man." It might be added that, aside from the finality of killing man's spirit, there are even more ways to damage, mutilate, or cripple it. The awareness that man, through his communication, is capable of inflicting emotional damage on others of his kind has long been a stock-in-trade of theologians, poets, psychiatrists and--more recently--humanistic psychologists, but has received scant attention from the speech communication discipline, in spite of its seeming relevance. Empirical data are especially lacking about painful or pleasurable outcomes of face-to-face interaction between persons.

It is the purpose of this paper and of the research upon which it is based, to take a preliminary step into this relatively untouched territory of our discipline by examining a construct that may be more closely related to man's "spirit" than to his intellect. The specific goal of this undertaking is to identify the communicative components of "interpersonal confirmation," and to systematize the identified components into a conceptual paradigm that will permit empirical testing of posited relationships and outcomes. This paper summarizes the work done to date in developing a method for observing

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and recording selected clusters of response behaviors which serve to confirm or disconfirm the self or the other. What follows is, of necessity, a "what explanation," because present knowledge does not permit the development of a deductively-derived "why explanation." (See peter Monge, JC, March 1973)

Defining Interpersonal Confirmation

Until quite recently the term "confirmation," as it applied to the interpersonal context, was too imprecise to form a basis for empirical study. Nevertheless it has been regarded by many as a significant feature of human interaction and has provided a useful perspective for examining social acts in terms of their emotional effects upon the targets of those acts. Martin Buber (9) attributed broad existential significance to confirmation, calling it "the measurement of the humanness of a society," and asserting that the disuse of the capacity to confirm is "the real weakness and questionableness of the human race." Although Buber did not provide much by way of explicit definition of confirmation, he consistently stressed its importance:

> The basis of man's life with man is twofold, and it is one--the wish of every man to be confirmed as what he is, even as what he can become, by men; and the innate capacity in man to confirm his fellow men in this way. . . Actual humanity exists only where this capacity unfolds (p. 102)

British psychiatrist Ronald Laing (24) treated confirmation somewhat more explicitly as a psychological concept, defining it as a process through which individuals are "endorsed" by others, which, as Laing described it, implies recognition and acknowledgement of them. Laing expressed particular concern about disconfir-

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mation, reporting that disconfirming communication is a characteristic pattern that has emerged from his studies of disturbed families. In such families, Laing noted, one child is frequently singled out as the recipient of especially destructive communicative acts on the part of the other members. As Laing perceived it, the behavior of the family "does not so much involve a child who has been subjected to outright neglect or even to obvious trauma, but a child who has been subjected to subtle but persistent disconfirmation, usually unwittingly" (p. 83). Laing further equated confirmation with love, which "lets the other be, but with affection and concern," while disconfirmation "attempts to constrain the other's freedom, to force him to act in the way we desire, but with ultimate lack of concern, with indifference to the other's own existence or destiny."

This theme of showing concern while relinquishing control is common is psychiatric literature and clinical illustrations abound, but a systematization of particular communicative acts which reflect these attitudes has not been heretofore attempted. Laing (24) recognized the difficulty of precise definition, but provided some general descriptions of confirming and disconfirming modes:

> Modes of confirmation or disconfirmation vary. Confirmation could be through a responsive smile (visual), a handshake (tactile), an expression of sympathy (auditory). A confirmatory response is relevant to the evocative action, it accords recognition to the evocatory act, and accepts its significance for the evoker, if not for the respondent. A confirmatory reaction is a direct response, it is 'to the point,' or 'on the same wave-length' as the initiatory or evocatory action (p. 82).

Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (45) employed the term "confirmation" to describe a kind of subtle validation of the other's self-image, which, if denied in communication, can have severe

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emotional consequences:

> O can accept (confirm) P's definition of self. As far as we can see, this confirmation of P's view of himself by O is probably the greatest single factor ensuring mental development and stability that has so far emerged from our study of communication (p. 84).

The descriptive material provided by Watzlawick, et al., to illustrate disconfirmation includes instances of total unawareness of the other, lack of accurate perception of his point of view, and deliberate distortion or denial of his self-attributions.

Bugental (11) added still another dimension to the concept of confirmation by using the term as a synonym for dialogue, which subsumes recognition of the other in addition to <u>involvement</u> with him.

In the few direct allusions to confirmation or disconfirmation, several elements are suggested. It appears that any interaction can be termed "confirming" to the other only to the extent that:

1. it expresses recognition of the other's existence as an acting agent,
2. it acknowledges the other's communication by responding to it relevantly,
3. it is congruent with and accepting of the other's self-experience, and
4. it suggests a willingness on the part of the speaker to become involved with the other person.

It is upon these four criteria that a model of interpersonal confirmation is based. The following section discusses the selection of indicators for each of the above criteria, and explains their systemization into a paradigm. Related research procedures

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and findings are also reported.

Sources for Paradigm Construction

The descriptive material used to develop a theoretical paradigm of interpersonal confirmation was derived from many sources, each of which seems to have direct relevance to one of the above four criteria. Although confirmation has been identified as crucial in forming and maintaining any human relationship, it has received most attention in clinical or psychotherapeutic settings, so such writings provided the bulk of source material for the paradigm. Of particular value were the clinical contributions of Bateson and his colleagues in Palo Alto, of Boszormenyi-Nagy and Framo in Philadelphia, of Wynne and his associates in Bethesda, and of Ronald Laing in London. Their findings with regard to family communication seem potentially applicable to any human interaction.

From these and other clinical writings a preliminary listing was constructed (1969) of some forty specific "ways of responding" which had been reported as suggesting recognition of denial of another's existence, acknowledgement of rejection of his attempt to communicate, acceptance or rejection of his self-experience, or a willingness or unwillingness to become involved.

In addition to clinical concern about disconfirmation in family interaction, there have also been some indications of interest on the part of speech communication scholars in many of the same or similar phenomena as they occur in "normal" or non-pathological sequences. Special reference is made to Giffin's (17) investigations of "communication denial," Leathers' (27) studies of "process disruption"

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in group communication, and Pearce and Rossiter's (32) exploration of personal/impersonal communication. Similarly, Robert Mark (29) explicated a scheme for coding communication at the relational level, which includes "disconfirmation" as one of its categories (although Mark, I believe, used the term in a somewhat narrower sense than did Buber or Laing). The findings and speculations of these communication scholars were used to supplement our list or to reinforce the decision to include certain communicative behaviors as indicative of confirmation or disconfirmation.

Factor Analysis of Response Forms

When obvious duplications in the original list of forty response forms were combined, the resulting 24 items were subjected to factor analysis (40), using the following procedures:

First, a description with examples for each of the 24 items was written. Each item was scaled continuously, with scale intervals ranging from "very typical" to "very untypical." The scaled items were then cast in a questionnaire format, allowing a respondent to describe the extent to which each item was typical or not typical of a specific other person. Ninety-five members of the International Communication Association responded to a mailed request asking them to describe, first, a person with whom they most enjoy conversing (the A target) and, second, a person with whom they least enjoy conversing (the B target). It was assumed that people would respond favorably to those persons who typically confirmed them and unfavorably to those who typically disconfirmed them.

The data were then treated to produce a matrix of intercorrelations among the 24 items, a principal axis solution for the

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matrix, and orthagonal verimax rotations. The factor loadings which resulted represent two separate analyses, one on the "A" scores and one on the "B" scores. Our interpretations of factors ceased when a given factor in either solution accounted for less than 3% of accumulated variances. As a result, two factors appeared sufficient to describe responses to both the A target and the B target. To test further the finding that two underlying dimensions form the basis for both "most enjoy" and "least enjoy" targets, congruence coefficients were computed for each of the "A" factors paired with each of the "B" factors. The results showed that there is a high similarity in factor structures for the first factor in both the "most enjoy" and "least enjoy" scores, and also that the second factor is similar for both scores.

A general summary of our interpretation of the factor structures is that the same two underlying dimensions of response form the basis for the description of both "most enjoy" and "least enjoy" targets. The preferred dimension was defined primarily by the items labeled DIRECT RESPONSE, AGREEMENT, CLARIFICATION, SUPPORTIVE RESPONSE, AND EXPRESSION OF POSITIVE FEELINGS. The other, or unfavored dimension was defined primarily by the items labeled IMPERVIOUSNESS, INTERRUPTION, IRRELEVANT RESPONSE, TANGENTIAL RESPONSE, AND UNCLEAR RESPONSE. For convenience, the preferred factor was identified as "confirming" and the unfavored factor was identified as "disconfirming," since the items which made up each of these factors seemed to parallel rather closely the interpretation of these concepts in the literature. One significant divergence occurred with regard to the item labeled "agreement," which was rated by our respondents as highly typical of "most enjoy" targets (although "disagreement" was not significant to the factor structure). While recognizing that

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agreement is pleasant, both original conceptual sources for confirmation (Buber and Laing) emphasized that agreement is not essential for confirmation. Laing made this point quite explicit:

> A partially confirmatory response need not be in agreement . . . Rejection can be confirmatory if it is direct, not tangential, and recognizes the evoking action and grants it significance and validity. (p. 82)

For this reason, the decision was made not to include agreement as an empirical indicator of confirmation, because to do so would have been a violation of the concept.

With the one exception noted, the forms of response preferred by the respondents in this study corresponded to clinical descriptions of "therapeutic" communication, and agreed in essence with Barnlund's (1) description of "constructive communicative relationships" and with the existentialist notion of "dialogue."

The Dynamics of Confirmation

Although factor analysis reinforced our belief in an underlying confirming-disconfirming dichotomy of interpersonal response styles, it did not explain why those particular forms of response labeled confirming should be pleasurable for the receiver and those labeled disconfirming should be painful. In attempting to better understand the dynamics of confirmation, the symbolic interactionist view seems useful because it suggests that human beings, in a sense, create their own pleasure and pain through their interpretation of another's actions. In George Herbert Mead's terms, the individual does not simply react to a stimulus, but "makes indications" to himself which allow him to interpret the stimuli he encounters and to assign meaning to them. Along with other symbolic interpretations, the individual learns to define and evaluate himself through others' responses

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to him; that is, he defines the total situation in some way, and his definition always includes the "assignment" of attitudes toward him on the part of others present. It was an assumption of this study of confirmation that certain symbolic cues acquire consensual validation and are therefore consistently interpreted by most people as reflecting positive or negative attitudes toward them on the part of others. Such cues, we believe, have message value, capable of arousing in the receiver feelings of being accepted or rejected, understood or misunderstood, humanized or "thingified," valued or devalued.

Most importantly, interpersonal confirmation is believed to be satisfying to the receiver because it affirms his own self-experience, and disconfirmation is painful because it negates his need to have his self-experience validated in interaction with others. In this regard it is possible to identify three aspects of self-experience, each of which may be influenced by meta-messages implicit in another's responsive behavior toward him:

1. He sees himself as an existing human being who is communicating and being attended to be another. The confirming meta-message is "you exist," and the disconfirming meta-message is "you do not exist." (45). Here the underlying dynamic of disconfirmation would appear to be the existential fear of non-being (in Laing's terms, the ontological fear of petrification and depersonalization (25)).

2. He sees himself as a being whose experiencing has validity and is acceptable to others. The confirming message is "I acknowledge your way of experiencing," and the disconfirming meta-message is "I reject (deny, disapprove of) your way of experiencing." Here the dynamic of disconfirmation is the fear of being rejected or blamed by others (42).

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3. He sees himself as engaged in some kind of relationship with the other person. The confirming meta-message is "We are relating," and the disconfirming meta-message is "We are not relating." The dynamic of disconfirmation is a fear of alienation, loneliness, or abandonment.

All three of these aspects of self-experience may be confirmed, or any or all of them may be disconfirmed in interaction. These form the basis for a ~~progressive~~ heirarchy of response clusters which will be discussed more fully later in this paper as a descriptive paradigm of interpersonal confirmation.

Conceptual Themes and Associated Indicators

Identification of specific behavioral cues which one might interpret as confirming or disconfirming to himself was made on the basis of the four criteria cited earlier, since these have proved entirely consistent with our research findings. The four criteria are treated below in the form of thematic assertions that are supplemented by brief explanatory material and sources.

Theme #1: It is more confirming to be recognized as an existing human agent than to be treated as non-existent or non-human.

Confirmation of another begins with some indication of awareness of his existence, and unawareness of him, in his presence, is necessarily disconfirming to him. (Such total unawareness of another's existence is sometimes referred to as imperviousness, although the term is not used in the literature with consistent meaning. Generally imperviousness refers to unawareness or misunderstanding of the other's perceptions and emotions, and is so used in this paper.)

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Even when the content of an interaction is of little consequence because it is ritualistic, phatic, or even meaningless, the very act of recognition is sufficient to reassure the other that he exists. The absence of a minimal show of recognition has been associated with loss of self (45), frustration (46), and violence to self or others (24). Total indifference, like total confirmation is presumed to be infrequent since "even the slightest sign of recognition from another at least confirms one's presence in his world" (24).

The human need for fundamental recognition is widely accepted. As William James has been often quoted as saying, "No more fiendish punishment could be devised, even were such a thing physically possible, than that one could be turned loose in a society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all members thereof." Laing (24) made a similar point when he spoke of the real nature of paranoid fear:

> In typical paranoid ideas of reference, the person feels that the murmurings and mutterings he hears as he walks past a street crowd are about him. In a bar, a burst of laughter behind his back is at some joke cracked about him. When one gets to know such a person more than superficially, one often discovers that what tortures him is not so much his delusions of reference, but his harrowing suspicion that he is of no importance to anyone, that no one is referring to him <u>at all</u> (p. 118).

In discussing destructive parental "put-offs," Chapman (12) called bland indifference to a child more devastating than parental hostility and added that "even unhealthy interaction with a difficult mother is sometimes better than the aching void of no interaction at all." (p. 32). Similarly, both Berne (5) and Harris (19) noted an infant's need for physical stroking, which in an adult may be translated into verbal "stroking," a term they employed coloquially to denote any act implying recognition of another's presence (5, p. 15).

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Positive strokes (approval, praise) are generally preferred, but even negative strokes (disapproval, punishment) are far better than no strokes at all.

Giffin (17) found that "communication denial" is positively associated with social alienation, leading him to conclude that the initiation of any communication event carries with it the implied message "Please validate me" and that denial of this request constitutes "anti-communication." Disconfirmation at this basic level can also be interpreted as an indication of the responder's inability to assume the role of the other to even a minimal degree; he does not perceive the other, nor does he perceive that his failure to perceive has been noted by the other. When this occurs, there is no confirmation, nor is there any communication (Ruesch, 37).

In the model of interpersonal confirmation which follows later in this paper, indifference is treated as the most disconfirming of all response forms, representing a general orientation of estrangement and disaffiliation toward the other (or behavior that is likely to be so interpreted by the receiver). Its indications include: silence when a reply is expected, monologue, disruptive interjections and interruptions, inappropriate nonverbal behavior, impersonal language, absence of self-expression, and various nonverbal "distancing" techniques.

Theme #2: It is more confirming to be responded to relevantly than irrelevantly or tangentially.

To deny another's existence is to deny the most basic recognition of him. Disconfirmation is not always total, however; it may include a limited recognition of the other. For instance, his existence may be acknowledged, but his attempt to communicate may be ignored or distorted. The speaker, by responding in a way that is

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disjunctive with the other's communication, can cause the other to feel that he is not heard, or attended to, or regarded as important, or respected as a speaker. Buber (8) referred to such disjunction as "monologue," describing it further as "two or more men, meeting in space, speak each with himself in strangely tortuous and circuitous ways . . ." Laing (24) called relevance the "crux of confirmation" since it lends significance to the other's communication and accords recognition to his evocatory act.

The quality of irrelevance in interaction has frequently been noted in the communication of disturbed families. Typical of clinical description of this phenomenon is that of Wynne (48) who reported that while individual statements in the interaction of schizophrenic families might appear normal, the transactional sequences were often "bizarre, disjointed, and fragmented." Irrelevant responses as a characteristic of family pathology were also studied by the team of Sluzki, Beavin, Turnopolsky and Veron (41), who used the term "transactional disqualification" to refer to any incongruity in the response of one speaker in relation to the context of the previous message of the other. Such incongruities, they concluded, may be a form of double-bind and as such are directly associated with the pathogenesis of schizophrenia. Their belief was supported in part by empirical findings of Beavers, Blumberg, Timkin, and Weiner (4) who, in observing communicative patterns of mothers of schizophrenics, noted a significantly higher incidence of indirect or evasive response. That is, mothers of schizophrenics frequently <u>appeared</u> to be responding, but actually had shifted to another topic.

Ruesch (35,36) labeled as "tangential response" any reply in which the speaker reacts selectively to some incidental cue in the

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other's speech, ignoring or missing his primary theme. Thus the responder may take cognizance of the speaker's attempt to communicate, but may still deny the content of his communication. Such a partially relevant response may take a number of forms. One way of responding tangentially is to be responsive only to a self-initiated topic, ignoring any initiatory efforts by another. Laing (24) illustrated this with the case of a mother who would evoke smiles in her infant, but never responded to the infant's initial smiles at her, returning only a flat, dull, look if the infant took the initiative. Hilde Bruch (7) noted a similar occurrance when parents tended to respond only to communication they had initiated with their child, ignoring the child's self-initiated communication. This seems related to Buber's notion that true dialogue requires alternation of subject and object roles, and that one's self-image may be choked off if he is constantly force-fed an object role opposite the other's subject (6).

In the paradigm which follows, the disconfirming power of disjunctive response depends upon its extent. Absolute irrelevance in the form of unrelated monologue is treated as maximally disconfirming; it is probably somewhat less disconfirming for a speaker to respond tangentially to an incidental cue, change the subject abruptly, return to his own earlier theme, interject a disruptive comment, or drift from the other's point.

Theme #3: It is more confirming to have one's self-experience accepted than to have it interpreted, modified, inhibited, or denied.

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Response "techniques" have been examined extensively as they relate to psychotherapy situations, with special emphasis on therapist interventions. In particular, a distinction has been made between the response technique of clarification and that of interpretation. Barnlund (1) summarized the difference between the two techniques in this way:

> In a clarification the therapist crystallizes in a few words or sentences his understanding of the feelings expressed in the immediately prededing remarks of the patient; in an interpretation the therapist goes beyond what has been manifestly expressed and identifies impulses and meanings that are not yet apparent to the patient (p. 631).

In spite of rather extensive studies of therapeutic outcomes of both techniques, results are discrepant (1). But whatever the results in terms of therapeutic goals, the use of interpretation as a response form in everyday non-professional interaction is reported to have decidedly non-therapeutic effects on the receiver. Laing (24) suggested that interpretation is often motivated by the speaker's own need to avoid conflict or to mask what the conflict is really about, or it may be an attempt on the part of the speaker to attribute his own feelings to the other. Laing calls this "pseudo-confirmation" because it confirms a false identity that is bestowed by the speaker and is not a part of the other's own self-experience. Such false confirmation may only confirm a fiction of what the other is taken to be without the other receiving recognition as he really is (24, p. 83).

In some instances, interpretation may reflect the speaker's obliviousness to any emotion that he regards as undesirable or that is uncomfortable to him personally. In Laing's words, such obliviousness often represents an "attempt to forestall a contradiction, a clash, an incompatibility, by transposing one person's experiential

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modality from perception to imagination"--that is, by implying, "You don't really feel that way, you are only imagining that you do." This kind of response disconfirms the other because it causes him to doubt the validity of his own experience or his mode of experiencing. Laing's examples of this kind of response are not infrequent in everyday interaction:

"You are just saying that; I know you don't mean it."

"You may think you feel that way, but I know you don't."

In a similar fashion, well-meaning friends, in an effort to be reassuring, may admonish another to "Stop worrying, there's nothing to be afraid of," or may say to a child, "Stop crying, there's nothing to cry about!"

Symonds (44) commented on a similar form of interpretation, calling it externalization, which occurs when a speaker asserts that something is true of his listener when it is really a part of the emotional experience of the speaker himself. For example, a wife may say to her husband, "You don't want to go to the movies tonight, do you ?" (meaning, "I don't want to go . . . "). With a child this sort of interpretation may take the form of telling him what he doesn't like, as "You don't want to eat all that candy," or "You don't want to play in that dirty mud." Such a harmless-appearing admonition may be disconfirming because the child in most cases does want to eat the candy and play in the mud. This particular response, therefore, represents another aspect of the double-bind; the child must deny his own feelings or risk his parent's displeasure, and either choice is fearful to him. According to Laing (25) a customary concomitant to this kind of double-bind is the process of "mystification"

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--the substitution of the speaker's motivation for the other person's real motivation as a way of exploiting him while expressing only benevolence:

> . . . no matter how a person feels or acts, no matter what meaning he gives his situation, his feelings are denuded of validity, his acts are stripped of their motives, intentions, and consequences, the situation is robbed of meaning for him, so that he is totally mystified and alienated (p. 345).

Interpretation can also be disconfirming when the responder implies that the other speaker has no right to feel the way he does. Laing (25) provided an illustration:

> 'But you can't be unhappy. Haven't we given you everything you want? How can you be so ungrateful as to say that you are unhappy after all that has been done for you, after all the sacrifices that have been made for you?' (p. 346).

The consequences of interpretation have received considerable attention in the psychiatric literature. Boszormenyi-Nagy (6) spoke of disturbed family interaction in which the "autonomous otherness" of certain family members is ignored when other members speak for them, interpreting their motives and describing their feelings. Buber expressed it similarly when he said, "If we overlook the 'otherness' of the other person . . . we shall see him in our own image and not as he really is in his concrete uniqueness" (16).

The paradigm contained in this paper reflects our conviction (supported by much psychiatric theory, but little empirical data) that it is disconfirming to be interpreted, analyzed, or spoken for by another person, or to have one's own expression denied, modified, evaluated, or otherwise restrained, and it is confirming to have the other person accurately reflect one's feelings, acknowledge those feelings non-evaluatively, or attempt to clarify those feelings. This view represents a slight departure our factor analytic findings des-

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cribed earlier, which showed the "clarifying" response to be highly typical of "most preferred" targets, but also showed "interpretive" response to be unimportant to the factor structure. As Barnlund (1) commented, "Far more data are needed on this factor, of course, but the drift of the findings suggests that focusing on expressed feelings and attempting to clarify them has considerable therapeutic value" (p. 630).

In the paradigm which follows, the cluster identified as "impervious response" includes several aspects and a variety of empirical indicators: interpretation, pseudo-confirmation, denial or distortion of emotional expression, and other forms of response which tend to deny the speaker's feelings or his expression of them.

Theme #4: Personal response is more confirming than impersonal response.

The discussion of interpersonal confirmation has, to this point, been confined to a consideration of awareness and acceptance of the other. Certainly these are fundamental and any behavior that suggests unawareness or rejection of the other or his mode of experiencing is disconfirming to him. There is strong support in the literature, however, for the belief that awareness and acceptance, crucial as they are, do not demonstrate full "endorsement" of the other unless accompanied by indications on the part of the speaker that he is willing to relate at something more than a ritualistic, role-dictated level. As Barnlund (1) asserted, a constructive communicative relationship is possible only when there is a demonstrated willingness to become involved with the other person.

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The precise means by which one speaker demonstrates to another his willingness for involvement are not altogether clear, although disaffiliation, or the unwillingness to become involved, seems to have several rather clear components which have been subjects of empirical research. These components fall into three groups which are: (1) impersonal language construction, (2) verbal self-concealment, and (3) distancing nonverbal behavior. What is known about the first group is derived primarily from studies of schizophrenic communication, which is not surprising, since schizophrenia is regarded by many as a breakdown in the individual's capacity to form and maintain relationships (3, 42, 18, and others). I have assumed that similar forms of impersonal response among normals occurs for much the same reason, and the difference is one of degree.

A number of writers have noted that the use of impersonal language constructions seem to erect interpersonal barriers between people. Lorenz (38) described the preference of schizophrenics for sentences beginning with "there"--such as "There are people who. . .," or "There seems to be. . . ." Rogers (33) commented on the habitual use of impersonal constructions on the part of his more rigid patients, and interpreted that as a protection against unwanted intimacy:

> His [the patient's] communication, even in a receptive and acceptant climate, tends to be almost entirely about externals, almost never about self. The form of communication tends to be: "The situation is. . . " "there are . . .," "they say. . ." If pressed, he might say, "My characteristics are. . .," but he would almost never say, "I feel. . .," "I believe. . .," or "I am uncertain about. . ." (p. 104).

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The habitual use of impersonal language would obviously inhibit a speaker's ability to disclose his personal feelings or experiences. The subject of self-disclosure has been a popular theme in psychiatric and psychotherapeutic writing and needs no support here. Strong arguments for the therapeutic value of revealing the "present and particular being" (8) have been advanced by Jourard (23), Janov (22), Laing (24), and many others.

At a nonverbal level, Rosenfeld (34) demonstrated that affiliation has several components, particularly those associated with proximity and eye contact. Exline (14) reported that "high affiliation" persons are prone to look directly at other speakers, while their low-affiliation counterparts tend to focus on work materials at hand. A further investigation of eye contact and affiliation (15) led Exline, et al., to conclude that:

> In general a continued exchange of glances would seem to signal a willingness or a desire to become involved with one another, or to maintain an ongoing interaction. Avoidance, on the other hand, would seem to indicate a lack of interest in initiating a relationship, or in the case of an ongoing interaction would indicate that one or more parties wished to break away (p. 202).

Distancing techniques might also include leaving the room while the other is speaking, moving away from him to a more distant spot, or engaging in other unrelated activities.

In a preliminary testing of this paradigm (Jacobs, 1973), the experimental condition identified as "disaffiliation" (including impersonal language, lack of eye contact, and physical distancing) emerged as equal to the "indifferent" condition in terms of its disconfirming power. We concluded that the implied meta-message "We are not relating" is perhaps tantamount to the meta-message "You do not exist." The paradigm as now constructed includes interpersonal response forms in the "indifferent response" cluster.

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There are doubtless other nonverbal indicators of affiliation or its rejection. Certainly tactile cues must be important as well as head and body cues and tonal or phonemic features of the voice. The extent to which such indicators are interpreted by the receiver as confirming or disconfirming to him remains to be investigated.

This section has presented four themes about interpersonal confirmation which occur with regularity in the clinical, psychiatric, and psychotherapeutic literature. These themes have been reviewed because they seem useful in explaining confirmation and disconfirmation. The section which follows suggests a method of systematizing specific behavioral indicators into a paradigm of clusters whose interpretations by the receiver, in terms of attitudes ascribed to the speaker, are potentially testable.

Constructing a Paradigm

It has been suggested in this paper that there are three aspects of self-experience that may be confirmed in interaction with another person. It is assumed that maximum interpersonal confirmation occurs when all three aspects are confirmed, and minimum confirmation occurs when none of the three aspects are confirmed. For the purpose of paradigm construction, these aspects, with empirical indicators of each, have been arranged into a progressive heirarchy of behavioral "clusters," ranging from least to most confirming. Cluster I is identified as INDIFFERENT RESPONSE CLUSTER and is defined by a general orientation of unawareness of the other's existence or an unwillingness to relate to him in any way.

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Cluster II is identified as DISQUALIFYING RESPONSE CLUSTER and is characterized by a general orientation toward the other of communication denial (inhibition). It refers particularly to message disqualification which occurs when a response is irrelevant, tangential, or otherwise disjunctive. It also includes responses that are unclear, inconsistent with other messages from the same source, or are incongruent with themselves.

Cluster III is identified as IMPERVIOUS RESPONSE CLUSTER and is characterized by a general orientation toward the other of obliviousness to his perceptions, especially his emotional experience. It implies recognition of the other's existence (hence is confirming of one aspect), but disconfirms his mode of self-experience.

Cluster IV is identified as DIALOGUE CLUSTER and is characterized by a general orientation of awareness, acknowledgement, acceptance, and involvement. This grouping represents maximum confirmation because it implies "endorsement" of all three aspects of the other's self-experience and has the effect of furthering the interaction.

Figure 1 shows in shortened form the various components of each of the four clusters. Expanded descriptions and examples are contained in Appendix A.

In order to test propositions about interpersonal confirmation as interpreted by the receiver of a communication, it was necessary to devise a measuring instrument. We accomplished this with the Perceived Confirmation Inventory (PCI), which is a summated rating scale of the Likert type. This scale provides a way of scoring how each participant views the other's view of him along six continua ("He is aware of me," "He accepts me," etc.), which together reflect the basic dimensions of the construct "interpersonal confirmation."

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FIGURE 1

A DESCRIPTIVE PARADIGM OF INTERPERSONAL CONFIRMATION

Response Category	General Orientation - Other	Transactional Indicators	Internal Indicators
I INDIFFERENCE	Denies Existence Denies Involvement	Silence when reply expected Monologue Absent or inappropriate nonverbal response Disruptive interjection Interruption	Impersonal language Avoids self-expression Avoids eye contact Physical "distancing"
II DISQUALIFICATION	Inhibits communication	Irrelevant response Transactional disqualification Tangential response Other disjunctions	Unclear communication Ambiguity Contradiction Incongruence Paradox
III NERVIOUSNESS	Denies other's Self-experience	Pseudo-conjunction	Pseudo-confirmation "mystification" Interpretation Denial, distortion, substitution of emotional expression Evaluation
IV DIALOGUE	Recognizes other Acknowledges communication Accepts other's self-experience Seeks involvement Furthers interaction	Speaks when reply expected Congruent and appropriate nonverbal response Listens without interruption Responds relevantly and directly	Personal language constructions Clear communication Shares self-experience Congruent verbal and nonverbal behavior Non-evaluative acceptance Clarification

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Jacobs (21) provided construct validation for the PCI by using an item-total correlation method to compare reported feelings of confirmation on the six dimensions for three targets: mother, friend, and professor. Inter-item correlations proved to be acceptably high for all three targets.

Recent Research Findings About Confirmation

Since the beginning of the confirmation research project, several provocative findings have been reported:

Sieburg (38), using a known-groups technique, found that effective groups used significantly fewer disconfirming response forms than did known ineffective groups. (identification of groups as effective or ineffective was based on objective performance criteria.)

Jacobs (20) found that subjects exposed experimentally to a "disconfirming" condition reacted significantly differently to their partners (who were trained confederates enacting behaviors described in Response Categories I, II, and III), and they attributed significantly different impressions of them to their partners than did subjects exposed to the "confirming" condition (Category IV behaviors). Differences in subjects' reactions to their partners in the two conditions were significant at the .01 level of confidence.

Sundel (43), stressing the reciprocal nature of communication, studied teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom in order to assess the relationship between the two with particular emphasis on the sequential pairing of confirming/disconfirming verbal modes. He demonstrated a strong positive relationship between paired teacher

and student confirming/disconfirming category classifications. That is, when teachers were confirming, students tended to be confirming; when teachers were disconfirming, students tended to be disconfirming.

Clark (13) examined the effects of three interpersonal variables (confirmation, self-disclosure, and accuracy of interpersonal perception) upon satisfaction and attraction reported in marital dyads. He found that the confirmation variable accounted for a greater part of thevariance than any other variable tested. Specifically, for couples whose relationship had existed for 1-3 years, confirmation accounted for 53% of the variance in satisfaction and attraction; in the 4-6 year relationship, 43% of the variance was accounted for by confirmation, and in the over-7 year relationships 50% of the variance was accounted for by confirmation. The variables of self-disclosure and interpersonal perception accuracy accounted for non-significant amounts of variation in reported marital satisfaction.

Summary

This has been an attempt to specify what interpersonal confirmation is by classifying and categorizing its observable phenomena. At present it seems accurate to report that confirmation is a critical and perhaps a unitary dimension of human interaction, yet it has been only imprecisely defined heretofore. This paper discusses preliminary efforts to clarify the construct confirmation in terms of interpretations attributed to certain symbolic acts, and to systematize the construct by identifying its behavioral components.

This paper has briefly reviewed portions of the relevant literature from several disciplines in order to establish the nature of confirmation and its underlying dynamics. From the literature and associated research, four themes have emerged, representing various

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aspects of confirmation, which may collectively define the concept. The components thus identified have been arranged into a paradigm which suggests a method of testing an hypothesized heirarchy of response clusters.

It is concluded that in spite of the seeming complexity of what it means to "endorse" another, the basic phenomena are few and can be described in four groupings, each of which can be identified by observable indicators.

Other studies are under way which promise to increase our understanding of interpersonal confirmation and to improve methodologies for measuring its occurrance in human interaction. In this way we may begin to gain insight about the impact of interpersonal confirmation upon human relationships--and perhaps gage its effect upon the "spirit of man."

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APPENDIX A

RESPONSE CATEGORY DESCRIPTIONS

Cluster I - Indifferent Response

1. Turns away from the other person; does not look directly at him or make eye contact with him. May leave the room, engage in conversation with a third party, or perform unrelated tasks while the other is speaking.

2. Makes no nonverbal response to the other's communication; facial expression is noncommital and gestures, if used, are inappropriate to the other's speech.

3. Makes no verbal response; remains silent when reply seems expected and appropriate.

4. If he speaks, his communication has the following qualities:

   a. He conducts prolonged unbroken monologue, not permitting the other person to enter the conversation, or ignoring his contribution if he does try to speak.

   b. Makes disruptive interjections, nonverbal distractions, and frequent interruptions.

   c. Favors impersonal language constructions in preference to first-person constructions. Seldom uses "I," "me," or "mine," substituting the generalized "you," "one," or "we" for any personal reference. Avoids self-expression of any kind.

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Cluster II - Disqualifying Response

1. Response is totally irrelevant to the other's prior utterance. Shifts to a new subject without warning or returns inappropriately to a previous topic of his own.

2. Responds obliquely by reacting to an incidental part of the other's speech, but seems to miss his main point. May appear to acknowledge the other's speech, but immediately takes the conversation in a different direction ("Oh, that reminds me . . .") May drift from the other's point back to his original theme. Tends to respond only to topics that he initiates himself, , avoiding the other's attempt to initiate a topic.

3. Uses unclear language that is difficult to follow because of its loose, rambling construction, incomplete sentences, abstract words, or referents with reduced specificity. May interject useless, repetitive patterns, such as "you know," where they serve no purpose.

4. Contradicts himself with conflicting verbal messages, or verbal messages that do not match nonverbal messages.

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Cluster III - Impervious Response

1. Speaks for the other, telling him how he "really" feels or what he really means. ("I know you don't really mean that.") While denying the other's expressed feelings, he may substitute a feeling not mentioned by the other. May answer questions addressed to the other and complete his sentences/

2. Denies the other's expression about how he experiences events, suggesting that "things are not really that way; you are only imagining it."

3. Evaluates other's expression negatively, implying that he has no right to feel as he does. ("How can you possibly be unhappy after all we've done for you?" or "You should be ashamed to feel that way when. . .")

4. Directs or advises the other about how he should or should not feel. ("Don't worry," "Stop feeling sorry for yourself," "Let's not get emotional about this," etc.)

5. While being critical of the other's expression, stresses his own benevolent motivation ("I'm only doing this for your own good," or "Believe me, I know what's best for you.")

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Cluster IV - Dialogue

1. Speaks when a verbal reply seems expected and appropriate.

2. Reacts to the other nonverbally (by gesture, facial expression touch, or tone of voice) in a way that seems congruent with what the other is saying.

3. Alternates speaking with listening, allowing the other approximately "equal time." Alternates subject-object roles by initiating and allowing other to initiate.

4. Responds in a way that is relevant to the other's conversation. May elicit more information about his topic, express interest in what he has said, reflect, or acknowledge non-evaluatively. May comment about his expressed or inferred feelings and encourage him to say more about them.

5. Responds in a way that is clear and easily understood. Sentences are complete, referents are obvious, and verbal messages are congruent with nonverbal messages.

6. Looks directly at the other, turns toward him, and directs remarks directly to him. Makes frequent, but not constant eye contact with the other. Does not engage in other tasks, but gives full attention to other while he is speaking.

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